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ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, prepared pursuant to Assembly resolution 39/125 of 14 December 1984.

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ANNEX

Report on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, 1995

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report provides a review and update on the programme of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and describes initiatives undertaken by the Fund in 1995. It also highlights UNIFEM's initial response to the recommendations of the external evaluation of the Fund and their implications for programming.

2. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 39/125 of 14 December 1984, UNIFEM is mandated (a) to support innovative and experimental activities benefiting women in line with national and regional priorities; (b) to serve as a catalyst, with the goal of ensuring the appropriate involvement of women in mainstream development activities, as often as possible at the pre-investment stage; and (c) to play an innovative and catalytic role in relation to the overall United Nations system of development cooperation.

3. In supporting activities that benefit women, UNIFEM remains committed to ensuring that women are full participants of the development process both as agents of change and as beneficiaries. By serving as an effective advocate for women, UNIFEM brings the gender component to every aspect of the development agenda.

II. PROGRAMME

A. Overview

4. Paragraph 335 of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women calls upon UNIFEM to focus its follow-up actions to the Conference on women's political and economic empowerment.

5. Accordingly, the Consultative Committee of UNIFEM at its thirty-sixth session, held in New York from 31 January to 2 February 1996, approved the two thematic areas, economic and political empowerment, and specific subthemes for action.

6. Under economic empowerment UNIFEM supports substantive programming and advocacy work in the following areas:

(a) Globalization and economic restructuring with special emphasis on trade policy and new technologies;

(b) New approaches to enterprise development with special emphasis on the enabling environment, including linking women entrepreneurs to innovative financial sources;

(c) New approaches to assisting women to minimize threats to and maximize opportunities for sustainable livelihoods including preventing undue harm to ecological balance in view of new global economic changes.

7. Under political empowerment of women UNIFEM focuses on the following subtheme areas:

(a) Gender and governance with emphasis on promoting gender-sensitive policies, legislation and processes;

(b) Women's human rights, with emphasis on the facilitating women's increased access to international machinery in place in the human right area and violence against women;

(c) Peace-building and conflict resolution with emphasis on women's roles in peace-building.

8. With regard to violence against women, UNIFEM was requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/166 of 22 December 1995 to establish a trust fund to strengthen its activities for the elimination of violence against women. Accordingly consultations have been completed and it is envisaged that the trust fund will become operational shortly.

9. The Consultative Committee also provided policy guidance to and approved UNIFEM efforts to participate in and support activities of the United Nations system-wide coordinated initiatives in the implementation of gender aspects of recommendations emanating from recent United Nations conferences, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the United Nations Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit on Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

10. In the post-Beijing period UNIFEM has devoted its efforts to the implementation of the Platform for Action at the national and regional level in the recommended programme areas and the implementation of follow-up to recent world conferences sponsored by the United Nations with regard to their gender dimensions.

11. The Consultative Committee also approved a programme that enables UNIFEM to analyse, publish and disseminate findings and lessons learned from both its own work and experiences gathered in partnership with international, United Nations system, regional and national organizations and networks on promoting women's political and economic empowerment. In that connection UNIFEM supports publications, public information, media and constituency-building activities.

12. As the operational and advocacy organization for the empowerment of women, UNIFEM collaborates with the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Gender Issues, the Division for the Advancement of Women and the International Training and Research Centre for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) to promote women's and gender issues in the United Nations system. In that regard, UNIFEM has been designated to chair the working group on operational activities of the Committee on Women and Gender Issues, an inter-agency coordination mechanism for system-wide follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, established by the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

13. At the request of members of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Board, an external evaluation of UNIFEM has been carried out and completed over the period from February to June 1996. The report of the external evaluation was presented at the September session of the UNDP Executive Board. In the paragraphs that follow information is provided on UNIFEM programme strategies since the Fourth World Conference on Women. UNIFEM will review these strategies in the light of discussions and recommendations of the Executive Board. Due account will also be taken of the recommendations of the current session of the General Assembly.

14. As the operational organization within the United Nations system mandated to bring about the empowerment of women, UNIFEM is ensuring that the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action are translated into catalytic programmes. Empowerment is the process of increasing women's access to resources at all levels so as to enable them to have greater control over their own lives, over the means of making a living on a long-term basis and, ultimately, greater influence over the direction of their communities and society as a whole.

15. UNIFEM's operational and advocacy work for the empowerment of women encompasses collaboration with:

(a) National Governments, to strengthen their capacity to engender policies and programmes and to develop the tools necessary for gender-responsive national development planning;

(b) Women's organizations and networks, to build and promote their capacity to advocate for their issues;

(c) United Nations system agencies and bodies, to keep women's issues high on the agenda of mainstream United Nations organizations.

16. UNIFEM promotes dialogue between national Governments and women's organizations, thereby involving civil society more fully in development planning and increasing accountability of national Governments to the concerns of women at all levels. The Fund then documents its work and widely disseminates best practices and lessons learned so as to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of development interventions.

B. The economic empowerment programme

17. Women constitute over 70 per cent of the one third of the world's population living in absolute poverty, and their numbers are growing. Their impoverishment has been exacerbated in large part by the transformations taking place in the world through trade liberalization, rapid technological changes, industrialization, structural adjustment programmes and environmental degradation. In recognition of the importance of correcting that trend, it is critical that the United Nations place emphasis on the role of women's economic empowerment in strategies for poverty eradication. UNIFEM defines economic empowerment as having access to and control over the means of making a living on

a sustainable and long-term basis and receiving the material benefits of that access and control.

18. During 1995-1996, the economic empowerment programme worked at two levels:

(a) At the policy level, helping women to understand better the implications of globalization and economic restructuring their lives and to increase the capacity of women's organizations to intervene in policy-making processes on their own behalf. Particular focus was put on trade policies, the impact of new technologies on women, and the conditions of the growing numbers of women home-based workers around the world;

(b) At the micro-level, developing and demonstrating innovative ways of directly assisting women to minimize threats to and maximize opportunities for sustainable livelihoods in view of these global economic changes. In particular, it has concentrated on issues of access to credit, markets, training, improved technologies, relevant information, land and management of natural resources on which women's productive sustainable livelihoods can be based.

19. The progress UNIFEM has made towards meeting its overall objective of assisting women to become economically empowered include:

(a) Within the context of globalization and economic restructuring, key policy issues such as trade, new technologies and conditions of home-based workers have been identified and strategies for programming in these areas developed. Some steps have also been taken in implementing these strategies in terms of creation of networks (trade, new technologies, credit, science and technology); packaging and dissemination of information (sourcebooks and guidelines); mobilization of women for advocacy (strategy workshops); and formulation of recommendations for action (workshop reports on trade/new technologies/science and technology/credit). Moderate success has also been achieved in terms of influencing policy makers and making international policy documents more gender-sensitive (Committee on Science and Technology for Development, home-based workers);

(b) With respect to support to women's sustainable livelihoods, benefits such as increased productivity of women's enterprises; creation of jobs for women; increased ability of women to handle technology and to solve problems; increased income for women; and an increase in women's self-confidence and well-being have been observed in the course of the implementation of UNIFEM's innovative pilot projects. Of particular interest is the extent to which UNIFEM support is enabling women to become more and more independent of the intermediary institutions that have given them initial assistance. This is due in large part to the strategy used in most projects of linking women with local sources of technical expertise, with sources of raw materials, with legal mechanisms, with markets and with commercially available credit so that they have access to the necessary inputs and services to be viable.

C. The political empowerment programme

20. Women's political empowerment means women's increased control over their lives both inside and outside the household so as to enable them to improve the institutions that shape their lives and to promote the building of stable lives in conflict-free societies. At both the Fourth World Conference on Women and the related non-governmental organization forum in Huairon, women demanded a world where they are empowered politically and economically.

21. UNIFEM's response to that demand since the Fourth World Conference on Women was the development of a holistic programme that focuses on:

(a) Women in governance and decision-making at all levels;

(b) Peace-building and conflict resolution;

(c) Human rights and violence against women.

The goal of the programme is to ensure the participation of women at all levels of development planning and practice.

22. Under the theme of governance, UNIFEM is continuing to build on its three-pronged strategy to (a) create an enabling environment where the legal and social status of women is improved, and more gender-sensitive policies and plans are not only developed but also implemented; (b) strengthen the women's movement so that it is able to create an enabling environment and effect social change; and (c) promote women's enhanced leadership and participation.

23. Under the theme of peace-building and conflict resolution, UNIFEM is intensifying its efforts to empower African women who have been displaced from their home communities and to promote gender-sensitive strategies and actions in peace-building and conflict resolution. The programme uses a twofold approach: (a) advocacy and capacity-building activities; and (b) direct assistance projects that have an integrated approach to the practical and strategic needs of women in crisis.

24. UNIFEM work on human rights promotes the principle that the protection of women's human rights is fundamental to ensuring women's self-realization and full participation in their societies. The programme's specific approach is (a) to strengthen the capacity of women's organizations to advocate for women's human rights nationally and internationally; (b) to increase women's understanding of, access to and use of the international human rights machinery; and (c) to bring women's human rights concepts into the mainstream of the United Nations system in order to improve the accountability of the United Nations for protecting the human rights of women and to contribute to increased United Nations system-wide cooperation and coordination on women's human rights issues. In addition, UNIFEM has focused on the issue of violence against women as an obstacle to development.

25. In recognition of UNIFEM's pioneering efforts at the operational level in the area of violence against women, the General Assembly adopted resolution 50/166, which calls for strengthening UNIFEM activities in support of

international, national and community efforts towards the elimination of violence against women. Pursuant to the resolution, the Trust Fund on Violence against Women has been established and is expected to become operational in late 1996. Priority will be given to activities in the following areas: awareness-raising, capacity-building, legal literacy, training, action-related research and innovative and catalytic projects. A special appeal has been sent to all UNIFEM governmental and non-governmental organization partners requesting contributions to the Trust Fund.

D. Building partnerships within the United Nations system

26. UNIFEM supports the principle of exchange of information and networking. UNIFEM has a close working relationship with other United Nations agencies, Governments, non-governmental organizations and the international women's movement. It has played a critical role within the United Nations in linking the priorities and practices of these various partners.

27. In all the recent United Nations world conferences (see para. 9) UNIFEM has worked with a large number of organizations before, during and after each conference to create political space for women's voices to be heard, consensus to be forged and action to be taken. As a result of its connections to a worldwide network of women's organizations, experts, activists and women at the grass-roots level, UNIFEM is able to help them place their issues on these international agendas and before national and regional forums.

28. UNIFEM is providing technical support to United Nations resident coordinators to assist in the implementation of the Platform for Action at the national level. UNIFEM work complements the work of other gender-in-development programmes, including UNDP activities, that are charged with bringing gender issues to the fore.

29. UNIFEM has chaired the Working Group on Women's Empowerment for the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development. The Working Group has developed guidelines to facilitate collaboration among United Nations agencies and between the United Nations system and its partners in government and civil society. UNIFEM has also collaborated with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to build links between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. UNIFEM and UNICEF are also working in partnership to promote the participation of women and girls in peace-building.

30. UNIFEM is working closely with Rosario Green, the Special Political Advisor to the Secretary-General on gender issues. Of the three working groups that have been planned under the Administrative Committee on Coordination Inter-agency Committee on Women and Gender Issues, UNIFEM is the secretariat for the working group on operational activities.

31. While core resources to expand UNIFEM's outreach to developing countries is the preferable option for resource increase, additional resources will also be sought on an earmarked basis to undertake specific types of projects and programmes in key areas of importance to women. For example, UNIFEM has already

experienced considerable success in raising earmarked funds for projects in the areas of elimination of violence against women and in peace-building. UNIFEM would also mobilize earmarked funds for other activities, including for its proposed flagship publication on the status of women's economic and political empowerment for documenting the women's movement as a force for social change.

III. MANAGEMENT

32. On 15 August 1994, the Administrator of UNDP appointed Noeleen Heyzer (Singapore) the new Director of UNIFEM. Ms. Heyzer brings extensive experience in the areas of programme implementation and policy-centred research, as well as overall sustainable human development, to her new position.

33. During 1995, UNIFEM pursued a vigorous fund-raising strategy to secure contributions for core resources and co-financing activities from both traditional and new donor Governments, the private sector and individuals. As a result, for the year ended 31 December 1995, income rose to $20.4 million, exceeding the initial estimate of general and earmarked resources expected for the year.

34. Efforts to increase UNIFEM resources and broaden its resource base resulted in an expansion of the number of Governments announcing firm pledges for 1996. In November 1995, during the United Nations pledging conference, 30 Governments announced pledges, compared to 17 in 1994. During that time, UNIFEM received firm pledges of $5.71 million for 1996, which represents an increase of $1.52 million from 1995. These firm pledges, when combined with informal contacts with donors who did not pledge, indicate that, in 1996, UNIFEM can expect to receive an estimated $13.250 million from 56 donor Governments. This represents an 11.5 per cent increase over the initial estimates of 1996 government contributions. UNIFEM will continue to intensify its resource mobilization over the years to come.

IV. INITIAL RESPONSE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF ITS EXTERNAL EVALUATION

35. As has been noted above, following the Fourth World Conference on Women, UNIFEM was given a strengthened mandate to work on the economic and political empowerment of women. Accordingly, it restructured its programme into two major thematic areas - economic empowerment and political empowerment - so as to better address these key issues. Within each theme, attention was focused on selected subthemes, including globalization and economic restructuring; sustainable livelihoods; governance; human rights; and peace-building and conflict resolution.

36. In the light of the evaluation report, which suggests that UNIFEM needs to sharpen its focus within the two themes of economic and political empowerment of women, an initial assessment of the activities that UNIFEM will carry out within these themes and an assessment of the strategies to be used in implementing its

work has been undertaken. This is aimed to help the Fund to build on the strengths and to address the challenges highlighted by the evaluation.

37. UNIFEM will focus on five strategies:

(a) Undertaking pilot and demonstration projects in order to identify, design, implement, monitor, evaluate and document projects that experiment with new and innovative models of development assistance with a view to providing models for use by other agencies;

(b) Strengthening women's organizations and networks in order to provide financial and technical support to local, national, regional and international women's organizations (governmental and non-governmental) and networks. This support will be directed towards enhancing the sustainability of the organizations that UNIFEM supports;

(c) Undertaking advocacy and mainstreaming activities in order to make policy makers and planners in key institutions, development practitioners, and the general public more aware of gender and development issues, and to increase their involvement in lobbying for policy change; to demonstrate methodologies and approaches for engendering development policy and planning at the global, regional and national level; mainstreaming a gender perspective into the work of other United Nations organizations; and acting as a resource base, within the United Nations system, for the implementation of gender issues and concerns into country programmes and initiatives;

(d) Brokering relations in order to establish effective linkages are established between non-governmental organizations, Governments, United Nations and other international agencies, and the private sector; and to encourage political and financial support for women;

(e) Documenting and disseminating information in order to document lessons learned through UNIFEM's experiences in key areas so as to disseminate information to a range of interested and involved countries, agencies and individuals.

38. This particular mix of strategies will enable UNIFEM to respond to many of the recommendations made in the evaluation. Overall, UNIFEM will support projects that are more strategic in that they will purposely aim to develop or demonstrate new methods of supporting women and to assist with advocacy, awareness-raising, brokering and capacity-building. More time and resources will be made available to ensure the adequate design, monitoring, evaluation and documentation of project experiences. In addition, because all projects will be linked thematically, it will be easier to learn lessons and build on individual activities at both the community and national levels.

39. The increased focus on advocacy, awareness-raising, brokering and documentation will also allow UNIFEM to respond to large numbers of women through information sharing, while its more systematic design of pilot and demonstration projects will allow it to be proactive and to become more innovative within its chosen themes.

40. UNIFEM is also aiming to respond more comprehensively to the recommendations of the evaluation relating to project design, monitoring, evaluation and documentation. In addition, UNIFEM will draw on the lessons learned from the evaluation in its future work.

41. The evaluation pointed out the crucial importance of UNIFEM's outreach in terms of UNIFEM programme in the regions. However, it also pointed out the strain of the demands on UNIFEM and the amount of time and financial resources available. UNIFEM also sees the need to expand its outreach to women in programme countries so that eventually it will be able to extend support to a greater number of women while building on the synergy of its partnerships with Governments, civil society and local organizations at the national, regional and global levels. With a doubling of its core programme resources, it would be possible to strengthen the impact of UNIFEM in the programme countries.

42. UNIFEM will pursue the goal of increasing its core resources in support of its outreach to developing countries. However, additional resources will also be sought on earmarked basis to undertake specific types of projects and programmes in key areas of importance to women. For example, UNIFEM has already experienced considerable success in raising earmarked funds for projects in the areas of elimination of violence against women and in peace-building. UNIFEM would also mobilize earmarked funds for other activities, including for its proposed flagship publication on the status of women's economic and political empowerment and for documenting the women's movement as a force for social change.

43. UNIFEM will provide a further report in 1997 on its substantive programme taking into account the recommendations of the external evaluation.